

STUDY GUIDE FOR THE WEEK OF: JULY 6, 2008

SERMON SERIES TITLE: PROVERBIAL WISDOM

REV. PREACHING PASTOR'S NAME: JIM COONS

WEEK 1 OF THE SERIES

"The Beginning of Wisdom"

Scripture:

^{NIV} **Proverbs 1:1** The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel: ² for attaining wisdom and discipline; for understanding words of insight; ³ for acquiring a disciplined and prudent life, doing what is right and just and fair; ⁴ for giving prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the young-- ⁵ let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance-- ⁶ for understanding proverbs and parables, the sayings and riddles of the wise. ⁷ The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools {⁷ The Hebrew words rendered fool in Proverbs, and often elsewhere in the Old Testament, denote one who is morally deficient.} despise wisdom and discipline.

Notes:

What is a Proverb? According to one David Alan Hubbard, a Biblical proverb is a "lesson" or "artistic instruction", often based on comparison. It is a way of using riddles, comparisons, and analogies to communicate truth about life, about God, about creation, and relationships. We can't read Proverbs literally, just like we don't read a valentine literally. When we say, "Roses are red, violets are blue...", we aren't saying that love is literally a flower, but that that love is *like* a flower. We are artistically describing and interpreting the meaning of love. The same is true of Proverbs.

The key to allowing the Proverbs to have their full meaning and impact in our relationship with God, with our families, and the world, we need to get our thinking straight from the start. This is what is meant in Proverbs 1:7 when we are told to "fear the Lord." When we stand in reverence before our awe-some God, we put our selves in a place where we can receive divine wisdom and begin to live wisdom-filled lives.

Questions For Further Reflection

1. Who is someone you would consider "wise"? What makes that person so?
2. Describe a wise choice you have made. What made it a "wise" choice?
3. Generally speaking, sin takes on two forms: 1) We think we are more than God (Pride); 2) We think we are less than human (thinking we're dirt, or even less!) If we understand Proverbs 1:7 to say that we are to stand in reverence and awe before God, how does this address these two tendencies? How does this bring correction to our understanding of ourselves and of God?
4. In what way do you feel the need for wisdom? In a relationship? In a decision you're facing? In your desire to live for God?
5. Describe the difference between "divine wisdom" and "human wisdom". How is God's way of doing things different than our way of doing things? Give examples from scripture.
6. In your group (or privately if you are using this for individual study and reflection), list attributes of God that speak of his awe and wonder, his majesty, power and splendor. List as many as you can. Use this as a way of "fearing God".
7. Proverbs 4:5-9 says, "Get wisdom; get insight: do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth. ⁶ Do not forsake her, and she will keep you; love her, and she will guard you. ⁷ The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom, and whatever else you get, get insight. ⁸ Prize her highly, and she will exalt you; she will honor you if you embrace her. ⁹ She will place on your head a fair garland; she will bestow on you a beautiful crown."

Likewise, James 1:5 says, "If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you."

What commands are given in these verses? What promises and hope are offered?

8. End your time doing what James says: ask God for wisdom! Specifically lift up those decisions and relationships for which you would like divine wisdom.

STUDY GUIDE FOR THE WEEK OF: JULY 13, 2008

SERMON SERIES TITLE: PROVERBIAL WISDOM

REV. JIM COONS

WEEK 2 OF THE SERIES

“The Repertoire of Forgiveness”

Scripture

Proverbs 10:12

Hatred stirs up dissension, but love covers over all wrongs.

Matthew 6:5-15 ⁵ "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. ⁷ And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. ⁹ "This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, ¹⁰ your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹ Give us today our daily bread. ¹² Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.' ¹⁴ For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Notes:

When we encounter a pure act of forgiveness like we saw in the fall of 2006 when the Amish in Nickel Mines, PA forgave the shooter who killed six of their children, it takes our breath away. It can be inspiring, but it can also seem almost offensive because we want justice to be served! This week we are being challenged by God's divine wisdom to be forgiving, just as Christ was forgiving. This Proverb sets up a contrast between hate and love. Hate in this context takes on the nature of holding on to the wrong others do to us, but love lets go and forgives. Lest we forget, our ability to forgive originates from God's "massive forgiveness" in Christ at the cross.

Questions For Further Reflection

1. Describe a time when you were forgiven. If you can't recall a time, tell about a time when you saw forgiveness in another person.
2. Define forgiveness. Does it require repentance on the part of the wrong-doer? Why or why not?
3. One author said, "Forgiveness is almost a single-word summary both of the Christian gospel and of the Christian ethic." (Brunner, *Volume 1, The Christbook, Matthew 1-12*, p.257) Do you agree? Why or why not?
4. What are the benefits of forgiving someone who offends or hurts you?
5. What are the liabilities of NOT forgiving someone who offends or hurts you?
6. How are love and forgiveness connected? Give an example.
7. Forgiveness is a lot of work. In fact it is a process that often takes time and the entire community. The Amish in Nickel Mines were well aware of this fact:

"Genuine forgiveness takes a lot of work –absorbing the pain, extending empathy to the offender, and purging bitterness- even after a decision to forgive has been made. Amish people must do that hard work like anyone else, but unlike most people, an Amish person begins the task atop a three-hundred-year-old tradition that teaches the love of enemies and the forgiveness of offenders. An Amish person has a head start on forgiveness long before an offense ever occurs, because spiritual forbearers have pitched in along the way. Like a barn raising, the hard work of forgiveness is easier when everyone lends a hand." (from *Amish Grace*, p.140)

How can your small group help one another build your "repertoire of forgiveness"? How can our church help build this repertoire?

8. Who is someone that you need to forgive? What steps can you begin to take in order to achieve this important and wise work?

STUDY GUIDE FOR THE WEEK OF: July 20, 2008

PROVERBIAL WISDOM

REV. GREG COOTSONA

WEEK 3 OF THE SERIES

“Created: Just, Right”

Proverbs 3:19-20; 11:10-11

The Lord by wisdom founded the earth;
by understanding he established the heavens;
by his knowledge the deeps broke open,
and the clouds drop down the dew.

When it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices;
and when the wicked perish, there is jubilation.
By the blessing of the upright a city is exalted,
but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked.

Study Notes

As Jim Coons said so well in the sermon that opened this series, the Proverbs are “Wise observations about kingdom living, not guaranteed formulas for success.” They are indeed God’s wisdom for lives well-lived. In this case, we see the close connection between human flourishing as a society or **city (11:10, 11)**, and righteous action among the people. As the Scripture gives witness, God is just. “The Lord reigns forever; he has established his throne for judgment. He will judge the world in righteousness; he will govern the peoples with justice. The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble” (Psalm 9:7-10). The Bible directs us to praise for God’s righteousness, for us to live with justice, and to hope for the day when God will bring it all to rights (Revelation 21).

Questions For Further Reflection

1. Do you sense that life is fair or just most of time? Where do you see justice or injustice around you?
2. Why do you think God want us to live lives of justice and wisdom?
3. There are many in our culture are treated unjustly. Who would you give as examples? How can we support those who are unjustly treated?
4. Where is God calling you as an individual, or us as a church, become more just and in our actions?

STUDY GUIDE FOR THE WEEK OF: July 27, 2008

PROVERBIAL WISDOM

REV. GREG COOTSONA

WEEK 4 OF THE SERIES

“Anger Management, Part Two”

Proverbs 12:18, 14:29-30

¹⁸ Reckless words pierce like a sword,
but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

²⁹ A patient man has great understanding,
but a quick-tempered man displays folly.

³⁰ A heart at peace gives life to the body,
but passion rots the bones.

Study Notes

I called this message “Anger Management, Part Two” because it continues the message I preached two years ago from Jesus’s words in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:21-26. There Jesus emphasizes the need to restrain our angry responses especially when they devalues a person. He also calls us to reconcile as quickly as possible for the sake of our relationship with God. (You might check those to further develop this theme.)

The book of Proverbs addresses our words and our “tongue” frequently and from several angles. From the verses above, we see (1) the need to restrain ourselves when we’re angry. We also find in this wise book, (2) the call “to speak the truth in love” (using words from Ephesians 4:15), and (3) to bless others with our mouth. (See Proverbs 18:21, “The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.”) In a word, God cares about our words!

Questions For Further Reflection

1. When do you find yourself saying “I wish I hadn’t said that”? Does it happen when you’re angry?
2. It can be difficult to respond to people that hurt or anger us. How can you address others honestly when you disagree or have been wronged without being “quick-tempered”?
3. What does it look like to bless others with our words? Are there people you can point to who are bless-ers?
4. Is God calling you to use your words in a different, more godly, way?

STUDY GUIDE FOR THE WEEK OF: Aug. 3, 2008

PROVERBIAL WISDOM

REV. JEFF GEPHART

WEEK 5 OF THE SERIES

“Friends: Keepers or Catch-and-Release”

PROVERBS 18:24, 27:5-6, 27:9, 17

18: ²⁴ A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. (ESV)

²⁴ Some¹ friends play at friendship² but a true friend sticks closer than one's nearest kin. (NRSV)

27: ⁵ Better is open rebuke than hidden love.

⁶ Well meant are the wounds a friend inflicts, but profuse are the kisses of an enemy. (NRSV)

27: ⁹ Oil and perfume make the heart glad, and the sweetness of a friend comes from his earnest counsel. (ESV)

27: ¹⁷ Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another. (ESV)

Study Notes:

One translation of 18:24 says “some play at friendship.” These Proverbs speak of relationships that go beyond mere, idle talk to real action, or concrete love, whether that is sticking with someone or being willing to confront in love, give good counsel or challenge each other's thinking. Read the proverbs and ponder what does it take to find and become a really good friend.

Questions For Further Reflection

1. What has been your experience of friends? Do you have many friends or just a few close friends, or both?
2. What has been your experience of a friend saying “the hard word.”
3. Who do you go to for advice?
4. Have you ever found someone who “grated on you” or was very different end up being a really close friend? What happened?
5. What do these proverbs encourage you to do today in your relationships?

STUDY GUIDE FOR THE WEEK OF: Aug. 10, 2008

PROVERBIAL WISDOM

REV. JEFF GEPHART

WEEK 6 OF THE SERIES

“Getting Things Done: God’s Plans and Ours”

PROVERBS 3:5-6, 21:31, 24:6, 27

3:5 TRUST IN THE LORD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND DO NOT RELY ON YOUR OWN INSIGHT.

6 IN ALL YOUR WAYS ACKNOWLEDGE HIM, AND HE WILL MAKE STRAIGHT YOUR PATHS.

21:31 THE HORSE IS MADE READY FOR THE DAY OF BATTLE, BUT THE VICTORY BELONGS TO THE LORD.

24:6 FOR BY WISE GUIDANCE YOU CAN WAGE YOUR WAR, AND IN ABUNDANCE OF COUNSELORS THERE IS VICTORY.

27 PREPARE YOUR WORK OUTSIDE, GET EVERYTHING READY FOR YOU IN THE FIELD; AND AFTER THAT BUILD YOUR HOUSE.

Study Notes:

Questions For Further Reflection